

Seasonable Advice ³
TO THE *Reading*
Protestant Dissenters

In the NORTH of
IRELAND;

Being a DEFENCE of the
Late General SYNOD's Charitable
DECLARATIONS.

With a Recommendatory
PREFACE.

By the Reverend NATH. WELD, J. BOYSE, and
R. CHOPPIN.

JAMES iii. xvii
*And the Fruit of Righteousness is sown in Peace of them
that make Peace.*

DUBLIN:

Printed by JAMES CARSON, and Sold by GEORGE
EWING, at the Angel in Dame's-Street, 1722.
(Price 6 d.)

Presented to the
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P R E F A C E.

TH E following *Seasonable Advice* wrote by an Anonymous but Judicious Author being communicated to us for our Perusal, We cou'd not but be much pleas'd with the truly Christian and healing Spirit that appears in it. It not only gives a just and fair Account of the present Differences among our Brethren in the *North*, and of the Reasonings about them us'd on both Sides, as well as of the most Material Proceedings of their Last *General Synod* at *Belfast*, which have been since
strangely

strangely misrepresented, but it is happily calculated to promote among our Brethren there the Exercise of mutual Forbearance and Love, notwithstanding some different Sentiments among them : Not different Sentiments (as some wou'd most groundlessly and uncharitably suggest) about any important Doctrines of the *Christian Religion* (in which we are perswaded there is an happy Agreement) but about the *Expediency* of the *Methods* to be us'd for securing those important Doctrines, and preventing the contrary Errors.

We cannot but heartily approve this excellent *Design* of the Author, and apprehend it to be entirely agreeable to the *Intentions* of the late *Synod at Belfast*. For tho' they thought themselves oblig'd to bear their Testimony to the particular Truth most remarkably oppos'd in the present Age by their *Declaration concerning the Essential Dei-*

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ty of our Lord and Saviour; yet in reference to the Point wherein their different Sentiments chiefly lay, viz. *The voluntary Subscription of Ministers already Ordain'd to the Westminster-Confession* which the Synod allow'd, they were Studious to prevent any mutual Uncharitable Jealousies or Censures, by the *Charitable Declarations* which those Ministers who accepted the Allowance given them by the Synod of a voluntary Subscription, made in favour of their *Non subscribing* Brethren; and by the like *Charitable Declarations* of the *Non-subscribers* with respect to their *Subscribing* Bretheren, both which *Declarations* the Reader will find mention'd in this Paper. And as We our Selves who were then present in the Synod, and had the honour of *Sitting and Voting as Correspondents and Members* in it, heartily Approv'd those Mutual, *Charitable Declarations*, so we had hop'd that they wou'd have
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laid a solid Foundation for Amity and Peace between our *Subscribing* and *Non-subscribing* Brethren : And we cannot but still hope that they will produce this desirable Effect among all our worthy Brethren on Each side, who are Men of solid Judgment, and of a truly Peaceable and Charitable Temper.

The mischeivous Attempts of a late Incendiary in his *Paper* entitled [*The Mind of the Synod, &c.*] to inflame their Differences by false Representations of Matters of Fact, and most base and unjust Insinuations against all those whose Practice was different from his Sentiment in the point of Subscription carry such a direct Opposition to those charitable *Declarations* in the *Synod*, that we hope none will approve 'em, who pay any deference to the Judgment of the *Synod* itself, much less will they be agreeable

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to those who regard as they should, that excellent Description of *Charity* (or *Godlike Love*) which an inspir'd Apostle has given us, That it beareth all things, belei-veth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. 1 Cor. xiii. 7. and who duly consider that this *Charity* is declar'd by the same Apostle to be *Greater even than Faith and Hope*. v. 13: This we are sure of, That if the Mind of the Synod is to be understood by the declared sence of a great Majority, it was quite contrary to what that Writer wou'd represent it.

It is therefore matter of great Trouble to us to hear, That some Congregations in the North (or at least some part of them) have had so little regard to the *Charitable Declarations* of the late *General Synod* as to give great Uneasiness and Disturbance to their worthy Pastors, on the account of
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their declining that voluntary Subscription which the Synod only *allow'd*, but never pretended to *enjoyn*. We heartily wish that those who appear so eager and forward to make a Rent in Congregations on this account wou'd seriously lay to Heart what the Judicious *Author* of this Pacifick Paper has offer'd to their consideration to dissuade them from such *Divisive Courses*, so opposite to the real Intentions of the *Synod*, so inconsistent with their own Principles with respect to Church Government, and (what is far worse) so contrary to the unalterable Rules of Mutual Forbearance and Charity which the Gospel so frequently recommends, and so strictly prescribes.

'Tis an hard Case, that any Worthy Pastors who have so long discharg'd their Ministry with faithfullness and Diligence, whose Ministry has been

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so Useful and attended with remarkable Success (and some of whom have been a Singular Ornament and Defence to the common Cause of Non-conformity) against whose Sound Doctrine and blameless Conversation no Man has ever brought any Accusation which he was able to make proof of, shou'd be in any danger of being deserted by their People, meerly because they decline complying with their humour in a matter contrary to their own Judgment, and which no General Synod has thought fit to require. This looks too like very injurious and ungrateful Usage towards those whose painful Labours among them (upon very self denying Terms) have well deserv'd other Treatment at their hands. And we wou'd gladly hope, That those Reverend Ministers who concurr'd in the *Voluntary Subscription* allow'd by the Synod will yet have that tender regard to the just
b Reputation

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Reputation and Usefulness of their worthy Brethren, to their common Interest, and to the Maintenance of that mutual *Love* and *Peace* which will be both their *Glory* and their *Strength*, as to use their best endeavours to discountenance such unreasonable and fatal Divisions. Divisions of this kind have been so often attended with woful and pernicious Consequences in all the Reformed Churches, not only to the breaking their Peace but to the weakening the Interest of Practical Religion among them, and we have such fresh and lamentable Instances of it in the present Age as shou'd deterr all that value our common Christian Profession from being Accessary to them, or even neglecting to give a timely and seasonable Warning against them.

And therefore as we cannot enough commend the Charitable and Christian Behaviour of those Worthy Ministers in the *North*, who tho' they fel

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in with the Voluntary Subscription allow'd by the *Synod* have yet shown that just regard to their Non Subscribing Brethren as to disapprove the Uncharitable Censures past upon them and discountenance their People's unreasonable desertion of them on that account, so we heartily wish this good Example were more universally imitated and that all who profess a Zeal for Truth would strictly observe the Sacred Rules of *Veracity*, *Charity* and *Common Justice* in their endeavours to support it. Truth needs no unjustifiable or unfair Methods for the defence of it, but is manifestly disserv'd and dishonoured by them. And we must add, that the Interest of our Lord Jesus Christ is so far from being promoted by those fierce Contentions and bitter Animosities which are too commonly the Effects of a blind and misguided Zeal, that nothing can have a more direct Tendency to obstruct the
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Success of the Gospel and marr the Edification of precious Souls under the Ministrations of it. And as this Consideration above all others, moves us to lament those unhappy Divisions that are among the *Northern* Dissenters, so we would fain hope our Reverend Brethren, who, we are persuaded, wish as much as we can do, the Advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom and the furtherance of the Common Salvation, will be so far influenced by it as to see a necessity of contributing their Joynt Endeavours towards re-establishing the Peace of their Congregations and bringing their present Differences, to an amicable Issue, that they may stand fast in one Spirit and with one Mind comfortably strive together in the Work of the Gospel, having no other Contention among them but who shall be most Instrumental to Glorify God and to save both themselves and those that hear them.

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That Pious Ministers themselves shou'd differ in their Sentiments about Matters of *Expediency*, and particularly about that of the Expediency of Subscription to human Compossures that descend to the Decision of many particular Points which are comparatively of small moment, and about which the Wisest and Best Divines may disagree, is not to be wondred at. This is what may be reasonably expected in this present State of Darkness and Imperfection where the best of us know but in part, and see as thro' a glass but darkly 1 Cor. xiii. 9. 12. But that they who are happily agreed in all the important Truths and Duties of Christianity shou'd, on the account of such different Sentiments about such matters of *Expediency* avoid Communion with each other, rashly attempt to divide and break Congregations whose Members have hitherto liv'd in mutual Amity, and endeavour to blast the

the Credit and destroy the Usefulness of such as have been *Burning and Shining Lights* in the Church of God, is a Practice most directly contrary to all the Injunctions of mutual *Forbearance, Peace and Love* which the Gospel abounds with, and particularly to that excellent and invariable Rule which the Apostle *Paul* has given for our Conduct, That *we should receive one another, as Christ also received us to the Glory of God.* xv. Rom. 7. And therefore we cannot but earnestly dissuade all those that love our Lord Jesus in Sincerity from incurring the Guilt of it. 'Tis a dangerous thing, 'Tis an heinous Injury, to *Reject or Desert* those (or even to grieve their Hearts and weaken their Hands) whom Christ himself will receive and own as *faithful Labourers in his Vineyard*, and that meerly for acting according to the best of their Judgment in matters wherein Ministers truly *Sound* in

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the Faith, and of great Integrity of Life, may easily entertain different Apprehensions. This will render no Man's account Comfortable in the great Day of final Judgment.

And we would further observe, how unseasonable the Conduct of such Deserters is with respect to the late Act of *Toleration*. It effectually deprives their Ministers of that legal Liberty which the Government has thought fit to allow them, and fixes an indelible Reproach on our common Profession, when tho' the Government has given all of our Persecution such a Liberty, we cannot in lesser Differences tolerate one another, but the People will of their own heads desert those whom the Government protects, and whom no Ecclesiastical Authority own'd by themselves has cast out or censur'd. We cannot but look upon this as an ill improvement of that Signal Favour that has been so lately

lately granted us and a most improper Return both to God and our Governours whose Clemency and Goodness we gladly take this opportunity thankfully to acknowledge, and are for our parts resolv'd to behave upon all occasions so, as that they to whom we owe this inestimable Benefit may never have cause to repent their Kindness to us.

As to the Case of *Intrants* and the Subscription requir'd of them by the *Rules* of the *Synod*, the Author has modestly offer'd what he judg'd most proper to preserve Peace, notwithstanding the difficulties that may occur in Presbyteries with reference to it. We wou'd only beg leave, (with all due Deference to our Reverend Brethren) to suggest our humble Advice as to that if ever the Affair shou'd again come under the Consideration of the General *Synod*. There is in our opinion an Easy and Safe Expedient that would entirely remove
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that embarrassing Difficulty, viz. Allowing the *Intrant* his choice, either to Subscribe according to the Pacifick Act or to make a Declaration of his Faith in his own Words, in which if any thing be found contrary to *sound Doctrine* and the *wholesome Words* of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, the Presbytery that are to concur in his Ordination may refuse to admit him. We think this *Latter* to be of the two a clearer Evidence of the *Intrant's* Knowledge and Soundness in the Faith and of his Sincerity in what he declares, than a meer Subscription to a Confession already drawn up to his hand. And as the allowance proposed will no way derogate from the Honour of the *Westminster Confession*, which is justly esteem'd by all the Protestant Dissenting Churches both in *England* and the *South of Ireland*, as an Excellent and Useful Summary of the Christian Doctrine, tho' they never insisted on a

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Subscription to it as necessary to the Admission of Persons into the Ministry among them ; So on the other hand, it will not put any fatal Barr in the way of such deserving Intrants as may not have freedom in their Judgments to Countenance by their own Practice the Imposing of Subscriptions to Confessions drawn up by Uninspir'd and Fallible Men, as *the necessary Conditions of Ministerial Communion* in any Church whatsoever. For whether they are right in their Judgment as to that point or not, we shou'd think it hard and unwarrantable to exclude such from the Ministry among us whom Christ has eminently qualify'd for publick Service in his Church and who are ready to give all reasonable Satisfaction to their Ordainers concerning their acquaintance with and belief of the Principles of Christianity by their own Voluntary Declarations, and by answering any Questions which those

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that are to Ordain them may think fit to ask as a farther Trial of them. This *Alternative* would, in our humble opinion, lay a Solid and lasting Foundation for entire Concord and Peace among our *Northern* Brethren. We (pursuant to our Instructions) used the Brotherly Freedom of recommending this Expedient in an *Interloquitur* of the last general *Synod*; but the *Proposal* coming too late and the Ferment that then appear'd rendring it unseasonable, we take this occasion of reminding our Reverend Brethren of it, as what we think deserves to be maturely weigh'd, and would, we hope, if agreed to, secure a firm and durable Union among them, a *Union* fix't upon a Foundation entirely consistent with the Liberty of private Judgment, and yet such a Liberty as is not liable to be abus'd to the introduction of any dangerous Errors. It was this alone we aim'd at in making this friendly Motion

Motion to our Reverend Brethren, and we wou'd again recommend it to their impartial Thoughts.

We can safely appeal to the Great Searcher of Hearts, that there is nothing we more earnestly desire, than to see both *Truth* and *Peace* preserv'd inviolate among them; and to behold them happily United in ardent Love to our common Lord, and fervent Affection to one another. Our *Subscribing* and *Non-subscribing* Brethren are both Honour'd and Esteem'd by us. We hope both are influenc'd by upright Intentions, and both act in Sincerity according to their best Judgment, and will be found among those Faithful Pastors whom *the Chief Shepherd* will adorn with *an unfading Crown of Glory*. We only wish such Brethren may not *fall out in their Way* to Heaven, but bear with one another in some difference of *Sentiments* about more doubtful

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Doubtful Matters, and of *Practice* according to those different Sentiments. We shall rejoyce to see their Flocks United and Peaceable, their Congregations *Edify'd* and *Multiply'd*, and those unreasonable Jealousies and Animosities extinguish'd that threaten an unhappy Breach among them. And we request all our dear Brethren to put a candid and favourable Construction on our thus appearing, to recommend *the healing Advices* contain'd in this *Paper* to their Serious Consideration, and to the Blessing of God on them, for promoting that great End of mutual *Love* and *Peace* which the *Author* appears to have in View. *Blessed are the Peacemakers, For they shall be call'd the Children of God.* v. Matth. 9. As it is under this Character we desire to appear and not as Abettors of any Party whatsoever, so if after all our reconciling Attempts, the groundless Jealousies and Passions

Passions of Men by a judicial Infatuation shall push things to a Fatal Rupture, we shall indeed be mournful Spectators of so deplorable an Issue, but We shall have this inward *Comfort* left us, That we have *deliver'd* our *own* *Souls*.

1722.

*Nath. Weld.**J. Boyse.**R. Choppin.*

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Seasonable Advice, &c.



It is very well known, that the Protestant Dissenters in the North of *Ireland* have been hitherto regarded as a great part of the *Protestant* and *British* Interest of this Kingdom: Their Numbers, the Advantages of their Situation, and their unsuspected Affection to the Government have rendered them considerable in the Eyes both of their Friends and Enemies. But nothing has contributed more to raise and establish their Reputation, than their firm Union among themselves: This was their Glory and Strength, a Happiness almost peculiar to themselves, which they and their Fathers, since their first Settlement in those Parts, have enjoyed without Interruption.

When Protestants of the same Denomination in *England* and *Scotland* were crumbled into Sects and Parties, by the subtil Artifices of their Enemies, and their own intemperate Heats, the Protestant Dissenters in *Ireland*, by the good Providence of God, reaped the blessed Fruits of an undisturbed Concord.

This was in a great measure owing to the good Conduct and Temper of their Ministers, a set of peaceable and prudent Men, who found themselves oblig-

ed by the necessity of their Affairs (as being for the most part under the discountenance of the Government) and by the Laws of their Religion, to use the greatest Moderation, and to preserve, by all just and Charitable Methods, the Characters and Usefulness of one another: For this reason we find that in their regular Concerts for promoting Peace and Order they adhered strictly to the Simplicity of Gospel Discipline, avoiding, on the one hand, the fatal Effects of Disunion, and on the other, that Rigour, which is apt to attend a Legal Establishment.

But now the World begins to hear, there are Divisions even among those Protestant Dissenters who were once famous for Union and Concord: Now their Ministers are distinguished by Names of Reproach; Evil Surmises and Jealousies are spread, as if some of them were infected with Erroneous Principles, while others are loudly Complain'd of as guilty of Imposition, and thereby departing from the Essential Principle of Protestantism, and Non-Conformity.

God only knows to what height this Difference may arise, if not timely healed, or what fatal Effects it may produce, but one may easily see the unhappy Tendency of it to bring the whole Body into Contempt, and lessen their Usefulness to the Publick, and what is worse, the Malignant Influence it must have upon Religion in general, abating Charity, and prejudicing People against their Ministers, to the entire hindrance of their Usefulness.

I hope, the sincere Friends of such a valuable Body of Men will be convinced, there needs no Apology for offering at this Juncture a *Seasonable Advice* wherein I only design to call them back to the Maxims of their Fathers, and the Rules of their own Discipline as well as of Justice, and the Gospel, as the Stable Foundations whereon Peace may be restored and perpetuated among them.



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And tho' I am the first * who have entred into this Debate in so publick a Manner, yet it is with the Spirit of a Reconciler, not a Party-Man, which as it affords me a great deal of inward Satisfaction, so it will, I hope, procure the better Reception to what I shall say.

It is a good Omen, that neither of the Contending Partys have yet set their differences in the View of the World, and therefore being so far disengaged, it may be expected they will be dispos'd to hearken to Peaceful Councils, and of *leave off that kind of Contention before it be meddled with*; For the *beginning of such Strife is, as when one letteth out Water, and the breach may grow wide as the Sea, so that none can heal it.*

It were perhaps not very difficult to trace the late Disputes of the Northern Presbyterians to their Original, and to shew who they were that first vented suspicions of Heterodoxy and ill designs (the present subjects of Contention) and upon what occasion they did so: But as that is not necessary to my Design, I shall always choose to draw a Veil over the Misconduct of good Men, rather than expose 'em to the World, unless some urgent necessity require it, especially their obstinately continuing to pursue such Measures as have a Pernicious Tendency.

* Since the Writing of this there has been published a Scandalous Paper, Entituled, *An Account of the Mind of the Synod at Belfast, 1721. In a short Reply to Mr. Dugud's Remarks upon the Declaration*, to which I hear there is an Answer, tho' I have not seen it. If that Infamous Scribbler shoud renew his impotent Efforts, I doubt not but wise and good Men of both Partys, will heartily Concur in the most proper Measures to disappoint the malicious designs of such an Incendiary.

I shall begin then to state the Case before me by only relating what is notorious matter of Fact: Some time before the Meeting of the Synod in *June* 1720. there were Reports induttriously spread, that some Ministers were embracing New Schemes both of Doctrine, and Church Government, and particularly that they had form'd a Design to alter or lay aside (so it was expressed) the *Westminster* Confession of Faith, a Book which has for a long time been highly esteemed by the People of that Persuasion: I may justly say they give it all the respect which they think can consist with the Perfection of Scripture: Upon this Occasion, the popular Zeal (which is very easily inflamed, when any Innovations in Religion are apprehended) was wrought up to such a Ferment, as had like to have produced very ill Consequences.

The Eyes of the People were on the *Synod*, to detect the Truth or Falshood of those Reports which had made them uneasy, and to secure the Confession of Faith, or some other Important Religious Concern (they cou'd not well tell what) which they had been made believe was in Danger.

When the *Synod* met (in 1720.) they found themselves extreamly embarrass'd; the Vulgar suspicions had got into some of their own Minds, tho' there appeared no grounds for them which might be enquired into according to the common Forms of Discipline (for which reason they certainly ought not to have been entertained) and they were threatned with the disgust and disaffection of their Congregations, unless their Jealousies were satisfy'd some way or other.

At last they came to a Pacifick Conclusion which it was hoped wou'd terminate all their Differences, wherein they declared, That the Reports which had been spread concerning the Confession of Faith, were groundless, honourable mention was made of that Book, the same Use of it was recommended which had
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been formerly made, and a former Rule obliging Intrants into the Ministry to Subscribe the said Confession, was revived, with an allowance however, if an Intrant should Scruple any Phrase or Phrases in it, that he might use Expressions of his own instead of them, which the *Presbytery* should accept of, if they Judged him Sound in the Faith, and that his Explanations were agreeable to the Substance of the Doctrine to be explained.

Before I proceed any further, I will here take leave to remark the Evil and Pernicious Tendency of groundless Reports. No Man has ever yet been able, (and I am persuaded never will) to produce the least Evidence of any such design as that of altering the Confession of Faith, and yet he must be a perfect Stranger in the *Northern* parts of this Kingdom, who does not know it was for a long time commonly talked of, with great Confidence, as a certain Truth: The poor abused People, like Men in a Pannick, fancy'd they saw whatever they were afraid of, tho' the danger was all Visionary, and a meer Creature of their Imagination: Many good People have said, they were informed by Persons of undoubted Credit, there was a New Confession of Faith in the Press, different from that of the *Westminster* Assembly, and designed by some to be Substituted in the Room of it, and that some of themselves had seen it, imposed on no doubt by subtle designing Men, or such who || *as mad Men cast Firebrands, Arrows, and Death, so they deceive their Neighbours, and say they are in sport. Behold how great a matter a little Fire kindleth.* Thus the whole Body of Dissenters almost, in that part of the World are put into Confusion, by t' e Petulancy of a few unruly Tongues, and yet as it the innocent People who were

mislead by such false insinuations, had been in a Combination against their own Peace, and designed to continue the perplexing uneasiness of their own Minds, they cou'd scarce ever be prevailed upon to trace their Informations to their true Springs, whereby the falshood of them might be easily detected, while at the same time they wou'd not rest satisfied with the contrary assurances given them by Men of unquestionable Probity, who had the best means of knowing the Truth of what they affirmed.

I know not how this can be accounted for, unless from the Nature of Jealousy, which takes an untoward pleasure in tormenting it self, greedily catches at every thing whereby it may be encreased, and obstinately refuses all rational Methods of discovering it's Mistakes.

It was scarce worth while to mention this Fact (which, I own reflects on the too easy Credulity of some and the evil Disposition of others) but that I hoped a good End might be served by it, which is, that Men may be render'd more cautious for the future, how they receive disadvantageous Reports of their Neighbours, especially if they be such as tend to the breach of Religious Communion.

Good People need not be dissuaded from inventing Calumnious Reports, for they are not capable of such Villany, but I wish they were as careful not to act inconsistently with their Character * *by taking up Reports against their Neighbours, which are raised and propagated by others.* We shou'd then see a speedy end put to the fierce Contentions among Christians.
 § *Where no Wood is, there the Fire goeth out, so where there is no Tale-bearer, the Strife ceases.*

I am sensible that some well meaning Persons who are disquieted with the Fear of Innovations do, out of a misguided Zeal for Truth, whisper about Stories that they hear, injurious to the Characters of Worthy Men, without any wicked Intention ; but I wish they wou'd consider that by this Practice, they are really (tho' undesignedly) *spreaders of Scandal, and their Words are as wounds that go down to the innermost parts of the Belly* : * Thus an Honest Man, thro' his Simplicity (but not without great Guilt) is made the Tool of a Defamer, and the Goodness of his Character with the Innocency of his Designs, only serve to set off Calumny with the greater advantage; and gain the more Credit to it.

The Report about altering the Confession of Faith is not the only one of this kind I cou'd mention : Many more of as pernicious a tendency and upon as slender Grounds, have been handed about by People not of the worst Characters, whereby the late Dissentions among the *Presbyterians* in those parts, have been at least much inflamed.

For my own part, I have fixt a Rule whereby I resolve to conduct my self (others may follow it if they see Reason) *viz.* I will not report any thing to the disadvantage of any Man, otherwise of good Reputation, but upon such Evidence as I think wou'd be sufficient to Condemn him, were I his Judge ; and if I hear any such injurious Reflection, I will demand my Informer's Proof, which if it appears not sufficient, I will require him to spread it no further, under the penalty of being treated by me as a Slanderer.

This seems to me so agreeable to the Laws of Justice, and Christian Charity, and withal so necessary to discourage Tale-bearing, that Bane of Soci-

ety; that I can never excuse my self in departing from it.

Sure I am, the Cause of Truth cannot be served by Whispeting and Back-biting, and whatever compassion may be due to Persons who are guilty of these Practices, without a malicious Design, to encourage them even by Silence in such a sinful Course, is far from being true Charity, and is indeed an abetting their unjust Treatment of those whom they wrongfully accuse.

I know it will be said, that some Ministers gave too great Occasion for suspecting them as inclined to Opinions which are generally reputed New, and of a dangerous Tendency; and in particular, that they expressed less regard than others had, or themselves once seemed to have, for the *Westminster* Confession, or at least for some uses which are commonly made of it among the *Northern* Presbyterians.

If it were so, that will never justify a false Aspersion cast upon them. Nothing ought to be lookt upon as a just Occasion for a Report to the disadvantage of any Person but that the Fact is certain and notorious. If a Man uses some incautious, or perhaps offensive Expressions, shall I therefore conclude and report him Guilty of other things whereof I have no Evidence? Shall I even charge him with all the Consequences which I may imagine do follow from his declared Opinion, tho' he utterly disown them? If such Liberty be allowed, no Man's Character can ever be safe, nor the Peace of any Society be preserved.

But what after all are the real differences concerning the Confession of Faith, that can be thought to have given any handle for the Intemperate Heats, and Injurious Reflections which have of late so much abounded.

I have never been able to fix upon any thing certain relating to these Differences, but this, viz. That

in the Administration of Baptism, all Ministers do not mention the Confession of Faith in the same Manner, and that they are not agreed in their opinion concerning Candidates subscribing it.

I shall consider both these particulars in pursuance of my main Design, which is not to enter into the Debate, or determine, whether Party has Truth and Justice on their side, but to shew that the differences are such as mutual forbearance ought to be exercised in them, and that they should not occasion any breach of Communion.

It has for a long time been the Custom of the Presbyterian Ministers in the *North*, when they Administer the Sacrament of Baptism, to demand of the Parents (whom only they admit as Sureties, except in the case of gross Ignorance or Scandal) a Profession of their Faith, and a promise to perform the Parental Duty: In enforcing of this it has been usual with them to mention the *Westminster* Confession as a good Abridgment of Scripture Doctrines. There is no Established Form for this among them, nor did the diversity of Form which Ministers used all along (and still might use) ever till of late give any Offence: Nay, I am credibly informed, that some years ago Ministers of the best Reputation frequently omitted the mention of that Confession at Baptism altogether, yet without being in the least suspected on that account.

It is not necessary to collect the various Forms now used, or to compare them, that it may appear wherein they agree, and wherein they differ. I will only take notice of that which is thought by some the most Obnoxious; and it will be easy to shew that no ground of Suspicion or Offence can reasonably be taken from it.

Some Ministers then when they Baptize, having first demanded the Parents assent to the most Essen-

rial Articles of Christianity proposed in plain and unexceptionable Terms, and in Conclusion, to the Scriptures as the only perfect rule of Faith and Manners, they next enjoin a Religious Care in the Education of Baptised Children, and they recommend as a help to grow in Christian Knowledge, and in instructing of Families, the *Westminster* Confession and Catechisms, advising withal to examine them and all Humane Writings, by the Word of God as the only Infallible Rule. Now what is there offensive in this? Is it that Parents are not required to receive, and to use the Confession Absolutely, without any reference to the Scriptures? This is so great an Absurdity, so entirely inconsistent with the Essential Grounds of the Reformation, that no Intelligent Protestant can make such an Objection. For if any Human Composure were in that manner to be absolutely received, then by a plain and necessary Consequence, it wou'd be substituted in the room of the Bible, and made the very Rule of Faith, or if it is to be taken on Trust as consonant to Scripture, without any Examination, the plain meaning is, that Christians ought to believe it Implicitly upon the bare Authority of it's Compilers or Imposers. But can it be expected by any one, that all Parents whose Children are baptised shou'd profess the *Westminster* Confession, as the Confession of their Faith? 'Tis certain the much greater part of them can't do it with Understanding, and for them to declare their Assent to a large Collection of Propositions, many of which they have not examined, and perhaps have neither Capacity or Leisure to examine, is but a piece of Solemn Insincerity (whether such Propositions be in themselves true or false) unless they were secure in the Infallibility of the Composure.

I do

I do not mean by this to represent the Presbyterian Party in the *North* as an Ignorant People; on the contrary, as it is certain their Pastors take great Pains in instructing them, so they have, generally speaking, as great a measure of Knowledge as the People of any other Church: But the *Westminster* Confession being one of the largest that ever was composed, and descending to many unessential and difficult Points in Divinity, about which very Learned and Pious Men are of different Opinions, it may well be supposed without any Reproach, that the Vulgar sort have not been able to form a deliberate Judgment concerning several Controversies which are decided in that System.

When these things are considered, I cannot think there is any real difference of Sentiments among Ministers in this particular, whatever different ways of Speaking they may use; nay I must conclude, that the Form I have now under consideration, is agreeable to their general Sense, and to believe otherwise were to have a very disadvantageous Idea of them, as leading their People implicitly, and concurring at least, in their making Solemn Professions, which they cannot make with Judgment.

But I hope the World will not imagine that Presbyterians in the *North of Ireland*, make a declared Assent to the *Westminster* Confession of Faith the condition of Christian Communion.

I find it asserted by Authors of very good credit, that no Church now a days requires any other Explicit Profession of Faith than what is contain'd in the *Apostles Creed*, in order to Baptism, which must be acknowledg'd a very considerable remaining Instance of Conformity to the Freedom and Simplicity of the Primitive Church, amidst all the contradictory Orthodoxys that are establish'd and vehemently contended for, in the several parts of the Christian World,

World; The Presbyterians of *Britain* and *Ireland*, never have been, and I hope never will be singular in straitning their Communion more than all other Churches. With a great deal of pleasure I take this Opportunity of vindicating the Church of *Scotland* in particular, from that Imputation; and I shall do it from the Authentick Testimony of a late Preface publish'd at *Edinburgh*, before a *Collection of Confessions, Catechisms, Directory's &c. of publick Authority in the Church of Scotland, together with all Acts of Assembly which are standing Rules &c.* The Author of that Preface p. cix. in answering an objection against the use of Confessions as Publick Standards of Orthodoxy, from the bad Influence they may have on Religion and Learning; says, "Notwithstanding the Authority
 " our Church (of *Scotland*) gives her Confession, it
 " is not made a Term of Christian Communion. And
 " afterwards when he designedly treats on this Subject, viz. the use which it is alledg'd the Church
 " of *Scotland* makes of her Confession, in the Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism; and p. cxli
 " he says, Sir *Richard Steel's* Assertion concerning
 " *Scotland* in his Dedication to the Pope, That Infants are Baptized there, not only into the Name of
 " the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but into the
 " pure Doctrine professed and settled by the Church
 " of *Scotland*, will appear at first view plainly ridiculous to any body who is tolerably acquainted
 " with our Practice or Principles. Again p. cxli
 " In so far as is known to us, there is no Act of
 " Assembly, nor even of any Inferiour Church Jurisdiction establishing the Confession of Faith, as a
 " Term of Christian Communion, and appointing
 " Ministers to require an Assent thereto from Christian Parents, in order to their being admitted
 " all the Privileges of Church Communion, and particularly the Baptism of their Children. And lastly

“ ly, p. cxliii. As there is no Establish’d Rule, nor any
“ Act of Assembly confining the benefit of Baptism
“ to the Belief of the several Articles of our Confessi-
“ on, and excluding from a Participation of this Or-
“ dinance all Persons who may in some things differ
“ from us, so there was no ground in Fact ever given
“ to a Person to complain of an Arbitrary Imposition
“ upon him in this respect, nor can any Man, so far
“ as we know, alledge that he acquainted a Minister
“ that he had Scruples as to some Articles of the Con-
“ fession, or was of a contrary Opinion to them, and
“ therefore that he could neither profess his Belief of
“ them, nor engage to Educate his Child in them,
“ and was thereupon denied Access to this Sacra-
“ ment. On the other hand there have been several
“ Instances of Persons, who upon their desire have
“ been gratify’d in this particular, while none had
“ ever reason to complain of a Refusal. From which
“ Considerations, ’tis hop’d the groundlesness of the
“ Clamors rais’d by our Enemies will evidently ap-
“ pear.

I have set down these Passages at large, that the Reader may have a just Idea of the Rules and Practice of the Church of *Scotland* in this point; and that the Presbyterians in the North may see what the profess’d Advocates for that Church find it necessary to say in her Vindication.

I presume it will not be alledg’d that the Northern Dissenters have any different Rules of their own, and then there can be no pretence of quarrelling with Ministers, if they did not mention the Confession of Faith at Baptism at all, much less when they do it in a way which is perfectly agreeable to Protestant Principles, and, at least as safe as any other for the Laity to preserve both the Freedom and the Sincerity of their Religious Professions.

Some Ministers may perhaps think it prudent in this Case to comply with the Popular Humour, so far at least as not barely to recommend the Confession, and expressly insist on comparing it with the Scriptures (which in the mistaken Opinion of many weak People carries the appearance of a diminution to it's Authority) though they must acknowledge it is in it self very just to do so: But I hope they will find themselves obliged to vindicate their Brethren who think it necessary to use greater Freedom, and that when the Prejudices of the People are against Principles both True and Important, * they ought not to silently indulged, but rather oppos'd in the openest manner. However I should be sorry, things were come to that pass among the Presbyterians, that the most innocent usages, and against which there is confessedly neither Rule nor reasonable Objection, could not be born with, but must be the subject of Discontents and Jealousies.

Another point in difference among Ministers, is about Candidates for the Ministry Subscribing the Confession of Faith: And here it must be acknowledged there is a real diversity of Opinion, nay it has appeared by Publick Debates in their Ecclesiastical Assemblies: But let not the Reader be alarmed, as if a breach must necessarily ensue, because the difference seems to be concerning the very Terms of Ministerial Communion: I hope to make it evident no such Consequence will naturally follow, and if on each side Men will act a Christian part, they may continue as firmly united as ever, with a safety to the Principles and Conscience of every one.

* In the present Case the Prejudice seems to be against the Fallibility of Human Compositions, and the necessity of Examining all Decisions of Men by the Scriptures.

Let it be observed then, that both Partys are agreed in this, that every Man who is concerned in Ordaining a Person to the Ministry, has a right to know his fitness for the Office, and particularly to demand a satisfying Profession of his Faith. 'Tis true the Ordainers, and Person to be Ordained being equally fallible, they may Err, the former in requiring a Profession of Propositions which are not true, or not necessary to be professed in order to Ministerial Communion, and the other in disbelieving or refusing to profess such Principles as are both true and necessary: Nevertheless every Man must act according to the light of his own Conscience, and though he shou'd Err, yet he cannot act in contradiction to his Erroneous Judgment without Sin. If the Dissenting Ministers are so far agreed, what danger to Orthodoxy can possibly arise from their real difference which is only about the particular Words wherein the Christian Doctrines shall be professed? Does not the Opinion which seems to allow the greatest Latitude, reserve to every Church, nay to every Ordainer a Right of Judging what Principles shall be professed; only we must all acknowledge this Right may be abused while it is vested in fallible Men. If any one thinks (tho' I can scarcely believe any Minister in *Ireland* thinks so) that the Explicit Profession of every single Proposition in the *Westminster* Confession is necessary to qualify a Person for the Ministry, he must act according to his Judgment, none that I know of have deny'd the right, tho' perhaps many are of opinion that in that case it wou'd not be duly exercised.

What I have said is sufficient to shew there is no ground for the Clamour that has been raised against the Opinion which some call New, and which is represented as breaking thro' the only Security of sound Doctrine, and opening a wide Door for all manner of Errors

Errors to come into the Church. For the Debate is not what Doctrines shall be professed as the Condition of Ministerial Communion, (a Debate of such Nicety and Difficulty, that Wise Men will not readily engage themselves in it, it has an affinity with that Question about the number of Fundamentals, which no Man or Church has ever yet pretended to determine) but in what Form this Profession shall be made. As to the precise Articles to be professed as a Qualification for the Ministry, the one party among the Presbyterians have declared no greater Latitude than the other: 'Tis plain to every considering Person, that according to their present Rules, that affair is placed on this foot *viz.* That every Presbytery (the only Assembly among them which Ordains, and consequently which in particular cases Judges of Qualifications for the Ministry) must Judge for themselves, *What profession of an Intransigent is to be accounted a sufficient proof of soundness in the Faith, or agreeable to the substance of the Doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession; or in other Words, what Propositions are necessary to be professed, and what are not.*

But I shall endeavour to give the Reader a clear View of the real Debate, that so he may the better determine whether it naturally, or necessarily tends to a Division.

Some are of Opinion, " That as Freedom is the
 " Birth-right of Mankind, any number of Men may
 " unite themselves in a Society for such purposes; and
 " under such Regulations as seem to them most convenient, provided they be agreeable to the Rights
 " of others and the Rules of Justice: But especially
 " it is reasonable that Men should joyn together in
 " Worshipping Assemblies; and as every Man has
 " Right to Judge for himself in matters of Religion
 " every Religious Society hath a natural Privilege
 " to

“Worshiping God and Ordering all matters of
“Joint Concern to the whole Body, in that way which
“seems to them most agreeable to the Supreme Rule of
“Faith and Manners; neither has any Man a Right to
“enter into the Society without their Consent or
“force them to entertain Communion with him
“contrary to their Consciences. In particular such a
“Society must Judge concerning the Qualifications
“of those who shall be intrusted with the *sacred Office*
“of instructing and governing it, and of these Qua-
“lifications, Orthodoxy ought to be esteem’d a Prin-
“cipal one. But since it is certain that various and
“contradictory Senses are put upon the Scriptures
“even in Important Points, and Contradictory Con-
“sequences drawn from them, the different Opinions
“of Christians cannot be all Orthodox and there-
“fore (they think) a bare Profession of the Bible
“can’t be sufficient, as not distinguishing between
“the Sound and the Unsound. The Christian Doc-
“trine does not consist in the meer Words
“of Scripture but in the Sense which being but
“One and Determinate, an agreement in it is neces-
“sary to an agreement in Faith and therefore,
“whereas the general Rules of the Gospel seem by
“a plain consequence (which their Brethren also ac-
“knowledge) to allow that Intrants into the Mini-
“stry should be required to make such a Profession
“as those who admit them shall judge a sufficient
“Evidence of their Soundness in the Faith, and there
“being no particular Form prescribed in Scripture for
“this purpose, there can be, as they apprehend, no
“inconvenience in the Church’s or a grave and wise
“Assembly of Ministers Composing a Form which
“shall contain the true Scripture Doctrine, at least
“their own sense of it so expressed as directly to
“oppose what they apprehend to be the most dan-
“gerous

"gerous Errors: What inconveniency (say they)
 "can be in this? Especially when such a chari-
 "table allowance is made to a Person call'd to Sub-
 "scribe or other ways declare his assent, in case
 "there appear to him any difficult or obscure
 "expressions, to explain them, which will be accep-
 "ted if he does not explain away the substance of the
 "Doctrine. What can hinder any Man's coming in-
 "to such a Subscription or Declaration, if it be not
 "either an unaccountable Humour or a disbelief of the
 "Doctrines contained in the publick Form which yet
 "they make no other use of than as a Test of Orthodoxy
 "among themselves: If any one cannot agree to it,
 "they will have all the Charity for him that can
 "be reasonably demanded, but they see no reason
 "for receding from their own Standard which has
 "been carefully examined and long approved, and
 "being accustomed to it as a Summary of the Current
 "Doctrine of their Church, it has to them a more
 "certain and determinate Meaning than any other
 "Form: They see no reason, I say, for receding from
 "it to indulge Men in a liberty of framing Private
 "Composures, which may generally be expected to be
 "more loose and indigested, nay and considering the
 "ambiguity of words and the subtle Artifices of ill
 "disposed Men, may one time or other be a sly cover
 "to dangerous Opinions. They seem to have the Ge-
 "neral Practice of the Reformed Churches on their side:
 "for the most of them have almost from the begin-
 "ning of the Reformation made their Articles and
 "Confessions Tests of Orthodoxy, and Subscribing or
 "otherwise declaring an assent to them, a necessary
 "Qualification for the Ministry.

Other Ministers are of a quite different Opinion
 and their sense I take to be this, "That no Church or
 Society

" Society of Christians of whatever Order having
 " a proper Legislative Power over the Subjects of
 " Christ, they ought not to form Exclusive Tests and
 " Standards, as Conditions of any Religious Com-
 " munion, the Terms whereof are as particularly de-
 " termin'd in the Gospel as the Infinite Wisdom of
 " our Redeemer saw fit; and we must not add to his
 " Laws. There is not the least insinuation in Scripture
 " even in the most General Terms of any Authority given
 " to Mento examine the Orthodoxy of Christs Servants
 " by Precompos'd Forms of their own devising, and to
 " lay so great a stress on such Forms, by making them
 " invariable Tests, tends to exalt them in the
 " Esteem of Christians into an Equality with the
 " Scriptures, nay to a greater perspicuity at least, as
 " if the Scriptures had no Determinate Sense, and
 " looks too like a Claim of Infallibility. They think
 " that from this certain Truth, wherein both agree,
 " that no particular Form of Confession is prescribed
 " in Scripture different from the Scripture it self,
 " an Inference ought to be made quite contrary to
 " what their Brethren make, *viz.* that no Church or
 " Assembly whatsoever ought to make one which shall
 " be a Test for others, because it seems to be an In-
 " fraction of Christian Liberty, an Encroachment on
 " Christ's Prerogative, and injuriously to reflect on
 " the Sufficiency and Perspicuity of the Scriptures, as
 " if they needed Human Decisions to ascertain their
 " meaning. There are not, they say, the least Foot-
 " steps of an Allowance from Christ to make Par-
 " ticular Terms of Communion for Particular Church-
 " es; nay to do so, is an unwarrantable narrowing
 " the Catholick Scriptural Foundation: Such Ar-
 " bitrary Inclosures and Topical Orthodoxys have
 " had and can have no other Tendency than to rent
 " the Church in pieces, and by precluding Men's im-
 " partial

“ partial search of the Scriptures to hinder a Reformation. For the most corrupt Church will pretend
 “ and has an equal right to Impose Unscriptural Terms
 “ with the purest, and the more corrupt they are
 “ still the more rigid in adhering to their own Terms
 “ as the most effectual Security of their Errors. They
 “ believe that to submit to Human Forms of Religious
 “ Actions, such as Confessing our Faith is, as necessary
 “ Terms of Communion, can never be reconciled to
 “ the Essential Principles of Non-Conformity, which
 “ stand, in a peculiar manner, on the stable Foundations
 “ of the Perfection of Scripture and Christian
 “ Liberty.

“ If the wisest and most Religious of those who now
 “ adhere to us, especially upon this Principle, that nothing
 “ can be made necessary by Men to Christian Communion
 “ which Christ has not made necessary, see us depart
 “ from that very Principle, placing our Union in an
 “ Uniformity of Words, and taking upon us to prescribe
 “ to one another the precise Forms of the most Solemn
 “ Religious Acts, they will presently conclude there is
 “ little more Freedom left among us than in the Establishment.
 “ If there were Truth in that pretence, that there is less
 “ Ambiguity in a Publick Form than in the Voluntary Compositions
 “ of private Men, and therefore the Church’s satisfaction
 “ concerning the Soundness of her Members is better
 “ provided for that way, yet what Right have we to take
 “ an Unscriptural Method for knowing the Orthodoxy
 “ of our Fellow Christians? Is not this to arraign the
 “ Wisdom of Christ by charging Defectiveness on his
 “ Rules? But tis known by Experience, no Words are
 “ more Ambiguous or have more contradictory Senses
 “ put upon them than those of Publick Forms, whereby it
 “ is indeed too apparent

“rent that Men are under Violent Temptations to
“Prevaricate in Subscribing them.

“They acknowledge indeed that most of the Re-
“formed Churches have gone into this practice they
“disapprove, but it must be acknowledg’d at the same
“time that the Reformation was but imperfect, and
“there are at this day but too great Remains of
“Popery in the Protestant Churches. Some of the
“Protestant Churches however have found it necessa-
“ry to depart from their Subscriptions, and the Dissent-
“ing Protestant Churches in *England* and *Ireland* (not
“the less pure for their wanting a Legal Establish-
“ment nay it may be justly question’d if in any
“Church since the Reformation, Purity of Doctrine
“has been better preserv’d, or more of the Genuine
“Fruits of Vital Religion have appear’d) have con-
“sistently with their own Principles, never till of late
“made Tests and required Subscriptions; a Novel
“Practice which has been unhappily follow’d with
“Jealousies, Strife and Confusion.

“In fine, they regard the *Westminster* Confession
“as a valuable Abridgment of Christian Doctrine and
“as such very useful both for Ministers and People.
“A Voluntary Subscription to it they will esteem
“a satisfactory Profession of Faith, so far as to qua-
“lify a Person for the Ministry, but they cannot agree
“to make it an Invariable Standard, even with the
“allowance of explaining any scrupl’d Phrase or Phra-
“ses. For when Phrases in it which a Serious and
“Orthodox Christian may except against are laid
“aside, even the Remainder ought not to be made
“a Test, and a Wise and Good Man whom no
“Church has a right to exclude out of the Ministry,
“and

“ and who agrees to the Substance of the Doctrine, may
 “ Conscientiously scruple Subscribing to the Human
 “ Form, when enjoyned as a Term of Communi-
 “ on.”

I Believe both Parties will own I have done them Justice in representing their Opinions fairly, and indeed more largely than my design necessarily requir'd, but since I have given them Equal Advantages, I hope I shall be forgiven in taking so wide a compass. 'Tis plain there is a Chain of Principles in each Scheme, and I have always observ'd that the Gentlemen themselves in their Debates, go as far back as I have done for them, when they fully declare their several Sentiments. I do not intend to enter into the debate to support the Arguments, or answer the Objections on either side; but may it not be reasonably hoped they will bear with one another? Is there any thing Intolerable in either Opinion, or for which a Christian can think the Rules of the Gospel will justify him in Excommunicating his Brother, and if we may not on such accounts cast our Brother out of the Church, far less may we defame and backbite him continuing in it.

For my self, I am persuaded that some, and I charitably believe, that all act from a true Zeal for what they believe to be an Important Religious Interest, and that the main intentions of each Party are such as both agree in.

Those who insist peremptorily on Subscription, design nothing else by it than to preserve what they apprehend to be Gospel Truth; and the Ministers who cannot agree to that as the sole Test of Orthodoxy but contend for Greater Freedom, are influenced by no other Motives than a zealous Regard to the Perfection of the Scriptures, and to the Unity and
 the

Peace of the Church on Gospel Foundations, and a concern to secure Religious Professions from the Influence of Human Authority, which they think absolutely necessary to their being Sincere.

If it be so, how can they take upon them severely to censure one another, meerly for some Involuntary Mistakes about the method of promoting such Valuable Ends as in the main they cannot but all approve of, I doubt such Treatment will be look'd upon by our Great Master as beating our Fellow Servants, which he will highly resent.

But perhaps it may be said, that though each Party must acknowledge the Errors of the other are not so great but they may be born with, yet when they act pursuant to their several Opinions a Division will ensue; for Example, an Intransigent into the Ministry refuses to subscribe the *Westminster Confession*, and some are for admitting him, others are for rejecting him meerly on that account. I ask why shou'd this occasion a Division any more than difference of Sentiments in another case. It is very well known that in Presbyterys and Synods, Members differ in their Judgments as well as in other Societys, but the Majority carries it and therest have a Liberty of Dissenting or Protesting. It must be suppos'd that all will agree in demanding a Confession of Faith, and I have already observ'd, that according to the Rules of the Synod, Presbyterys (*i. e.* the Majority) when they differ in their Opinions must determine whether the Confession an Intransigent makes, is a sufficient Evidence of his Soundness in the Faith, or for the substance, agreeable to the Doctrine contained in the *Westminster Confession*.

This then is the natural course in which such an Affair ought to be issued: When a debate happens, let the Majority after mature deliberation determine and the rest acquiesce, only with a liberty of reasoning calmly

calmly against the Decision, and afterwards of Dissenting and Protesting as they shall see cause. Is it the peculiar unhappiness of Ecclesiastical Assemblies that they cannot differ in Judgment without a Schism? Shall every or any Conclusion be a Test to the Members, and the Minority be held unworthy of their places in the Society, because they gave their Voices against the Judgment of their Fellow Members? Or must the Sullen Minority break off whenever a Resolution is carry'd against them? These are such Absurdities as can never find place with reasonable and peaceable Men. If I were a Member of such Societys I should condemn my self as acting a very Vile and Schismatical part, if I consented to the Exclusion of my Brother unless he transgress'd the plain Essential Rules of Society and the Gospel, whatever opposition he might give to the particular Decisions of these Assemblies (a compliance with which I'm perswaded ought not to be nor can by Dissenters consistently with their own Principles be made the Condition of any Religious Communion) or if I should break off from, or endeavour to dissolve the Association while nothing sinful was requir'd to be done by me as the Condition of my continuing in it, tho' things very inexpedient or even sinful (such as the rejecting a Minister whom I thought well qualify'd) were carry'd by the Majority while I had Liberty openly to declare my Dissent, and were not bound to any Criminal Act or Omission.

Thus I think it is very plain, that if our Ministers are Charitably disposed, there may remain a firm Union among them notwithstanding their diversity of Judgment, and all the valuable purposes of their Associations may be pursued by their Joint Counsels as formerly, with a perfect safety to the Consciences of all, and without laying any of them under a necessity of departing

departing from their sentiments. I wish many of them may not be too much influenced by remote uncertain views and inadvertently bring on a present Mischief; *i. e.* a Rupture among themselves by being too Sollicitous to provide against a future Danger that may never happen, *viz.* the entrance of erroneous Persons into their Communion: Such a provision is the less necessary because the Rules of the Gospel and their own Discipline afford them a just and unexceptionable way of purging out Heresies when they are detected. The Maxim, that the Wisdom of Prevention is better than that of Remedy, does not hold in this case when the disease is uncertain. The Remedy is plain and all are agreed in the application of it, but the Preventive is at least doubtful, and in the opinion of many unlawful, and it cannot be used without a Fatal Breach.

I will next consider the state of affairs among the Presbyterians at, and since the last Synod, and to introduce me to this it is necessary to observe that between the meetings of the Synod in June, 1720 and 1721, the Popular Jealousies increas'd prodigiously: The Pacifick Conclusion already mention'd was so far from quieting the minds of the People, that they took a greater Licence than ever in reproaching Ministers. Several Incidents contributed to this which I will not mention, and I wish indirect Arts and Industry had not been used to inflame the Populace. Some Ministers however, finding themselves uneasy by the discontents of many in their Congregations, thought fit in their lesser Assemblies, in order to restore and preserve their Quiet, to subscribe the *Westminster* Confession (tho' there had been no concert in the Synod to that purpose) as the best assurance they could give of their Orthodoxy. This had the intended effect, in securing to them the esteem of their

Congregations, but it had another effect too (which, I hope, few, if any, of them intended) that is to increase Suspensions concerning such of their Brethren as did not Subscribe anew and on that particular occasion. People came to the Synod from far distant parts with loud demands of an Universal Subscription as the only effectual way to vindicate the Ministry from aspersions cast upon some (tho' no Person was nam'd) and to satisfy many of our own Communion who were deeply impress'd with Jealousy. How these Affairs were conducted in the Synod I will not particularly relate, but two things were concluded on which, with the Consequences of them, have been the Subject of great Speculation.

First, *A Declaration concerning the Eternal and Independent Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ*, which has been printed and the Reader cannot be ignorant of it: In this, some Ministers did not vote with the Synod, which many People, either thro' mistake or malice, have represented as proceeding from their disbelief of the Doctrine, tho' scarcely in any case could there have been greater Evidence of the contrary. For,

First, In the Declaration it self it is expressly asserted by all who joyn'd in it, that they know none of our Persuasion in this Kingdom who are erroneous in that Point. Here is a solemn Testimony given by a Great Assembly to all the Presbyterians in Ireland, both Ministers and People, and to suppose that they believ'd some of their own Members, at the same time, unsound in that very Article they were Declaring, is to charge the Synod with the grossest dissimulation. If the Behaviour of the Ministers who declin'd Voting was any cause to suspect them, their Brethren were the best Judges

Judges of it ; but it is plain, they thought it gave no just ground of Suspicion at all.

Secondly, In the Synod's Minutes 'tis observ'd, *That some Ministers were unwilling to come into the Overture (the Printed Declaration) and expressly asserted, that the reason of their unwillingness was not because they believ'd the Article of Christ's Supreme Deity, for that Article they profess in the strongest Terms.* So that, if all the Members of the Synod (before whom the Minute was publicly read and they approv'd it) may be believ'd as Witnesses of Fact, they have given an Authentick Vindication of their Brethren, which methinks might silence the Clamour of ignorant or ill natur'd People who either were not present or could not understand what was so openly transacted in their own hearing. And,

Thirdly, The true Reason of those Ministers refusing to Vote is given in the same Minute, *viz. That they in their Judgments were against all Authoritative, Humane Decisions as Tests of Orthodoxy, and because they judg'd such a Declaration unseasonable at that time.*

When these Circumstances are put together and impartially weigh'd, the Candid Reader may be safely trusted to judge for himself, whether there be, from the Transactions of the Synod in this Affair, just Ground of suspecting, that any of the Presbyterian Ministers are Erroneous in the Article of *Christ's Divinity*: And yet some People are weak or prejudic'd enough, at least to speak as if they did entertain Jealousies on that account. They say, it is strange that Ministers, if they were firmly perswaded of so great a Truth, should decline any manner or any opportunity of declaring it. But such Reasonings and Surmises proceed from an entire

are unacquaintedness with the Debate about subscribing or declaring Articles of Religion in Humane Forms as the only Evidences of Orthodoxy. And because the Persons whom, for their own sakes, I could heartily wish to be satisfy'd in this matter, either have not seen or perhaps can't easily enter into the notion of the Arguments which are contain'd in Learned Treatises on that Subject, I will propose a few plain Questions to them, whereby I hope the fallacy of their Objections will appear. Do they think all the Ministers in *Ireland* who never till last *June* declar'd Christ's Divinity in the Synods Form were to be suspected? I suppose it will be readily acknowledg'd, they were not: It follows then, that this Declaration is not the Sole Test of Orthodoxy, or that no Man is to be condemn'd as Erroneous meerly for not making it. If it be objected, that the Form was not compiled before last *June* and no one declin'd it; the Case is very different between not making a Declaration when it is not propos'd and refusing it when it is propos'd. I answer, The Article of Christ's Deity did not then begin to be or to be sufficiently express'd, and still 'tis evident, that meerly not declaring in that Form is no just Ground for condemning any Person as Heterodox, since that Form it self is not the only just and sufficient Expression of the Article, and therefore whatever construction may be put on refusing that Declaration, it can't possibly amount to a Proof of any Person's denying the Doctrine; else the Importance, the Essence, at least the Perspicuity of Christian Doctrines depends on Forms Compos'd by Fallible Men, which insinuates such an Imputation of Defectiveness on the Scriptures as no Protestant will allow, and which, if I apprehend right, it was the principal Design of the Non-declarers to avoid. For we may reasonably suppose what in effect the Synod's Minute

Minute asserts to have been Fact, that the principal Scruple was against a Fallible Assembly's appropriating the Declaration of any Scripture Doctrine to a late invented Set of Words so as they only should be satisfying.

Again I ask, what Satisfaction, what assurance of their Soundness in the Faith would these Ministers have given if they had voted with their Brethren? We must have depended on their Sincerity, and have we not the same Security by their declaring the Doctrine in their own Terms, which the Synod calls the Strongest Terms, and by their solemnly assuring their Brethren and others, that their refusal at that time and in those Circumstances to declare did not proceed from a disbelief of the Doctrine? What Powerful Charm is there in a Human Form of Words, that it only must be satisfying? Is the Candour of Men confin'd to it, or the Truth of God? And Lastly, Is it a sufficient Evidence against any Man, (sufficient I mean to Conclude him Guilty) that he refuses to purge himself of a suspected Offence by his own Testimony and according to a particular Form? It has hitherto been reckoned unjust to Condemn any Person without Evidence. The Law of God expressly determines that || *One Witness shall not rise up against a Man for any Iniquity or any Sin, in any Sin that he sinneth: at the Mouth of two Witnesses or at the Mouth of three Witnesses, shall the Matter be established:* And it is an invariable Apostolical Canon † *Against an Elder receive not an Accusation but before* (by the Testimony of) *two or three Witnesses.* Can it be reasonable then to pronounce Sentence on a considerable

|| Deut. 19. 15. * 1 Tim. 5. 19.

Number

Number of Elders as Guilty of Heresy without any Witness at all? Or so to invert the Laws of Nature and of the Gospel, as to make their Innocence or Guiltiness before Men stand on the Foot of their own Testimony, accusing or acquitting them? I do not charge the Synod with such Injustice; I know, and I would have the World to know, that their Publick Actings stood clear of it, otherwise I would call their *Declaration* no better than an **UNRIGHT-
EOUS INQUISITION**: They only thought (that is the Majority) their *Declaration* Expedient, and as such proposed it to their Brethren, who differed from them in Opinion; but did the Synod therefore say, the Non-Declarers were Erroneous; on the contrary they pronounc'd them Sound. If any private Persons shall take upon them to Judge otherwise, as I'm afraid some have done, let them try how they will be able to reconcile their *rash Judging* to the plain Rules of Natural Justice and Christianity.

Let it be observ'd that tho' I have in this Case enter'd into the Defence of one Party more than my main Design necessarily led me to, yet it is not in any matter of debate between them and their Brethren, but to refute an unjust Charge laid against them, wherein I would not willingly suppose Ministers to have any Hand: To set the Truth in a clear Light, I thought, might Contribute to the healing of Differences among the People, by showing them they have no cause to suspect any of their Ministers as unsound, which I Hope may remove their greatest Uneasiness. I have not said the Synod's Declaration was inexpedient, nor have I said the contrary, and this I take to be the Question among Ministers; but whether it was or not, there is no Ground from it, or the Consequences of it, to accuse any of Heterodoxy.

The second Thing propos'd in the Synod and after a long Debate Concluded on, which I shall take Notice of, was Subscribing the *Westminster* Confession of Faith, which has been the occasion of great Noise, Jealousy and Confusion, however Innocently it might be at first intended. The Mouths of People are open'd wide, Reflections are liberally thrown as Men affect the Persons and Characters or the Opinions of the Partys; but as the Majority of the People are of the same Sentiments with the Majority of the Ministers, without having Knowledge and Charity enough to keep them within due Bounds, a clamorous indiscreet Zeal for Orthodoxy does almost every where prevail, and is a plentiful Source of continual Reproaches. The generality of the Laity concur in laying the Blame of their Dissentions upon the Ministers; they seem to think that their (the Minister's) Disagreement among themselves, justifies the utmost Licence the People take in despising, reflecting upon, nay and deserting their Ministers, which has been the Practice of some and the declared Resolution of others.

I hope to make it appear that the Laity are in this intirely mistaken, that themselves, not their Ministers, are in the Fault that Things are carry'd to such an Extremity; and that if they will hearken to Reasonable and Peaceful Counsels, Peace may yet be restor'd and preserv'd among them on the Foundations which the Ministers have laid. When I speak of the Ministers I would be understood to mean the Synod where they were Assembled in a Body, the private Conduct of some I do not Concern my self with, further than to wish it may be Regular and Agreeable to their publick Concerts.

It will not here be necessary to insist on the Reasonings of the partys in the Affair of Subscribing; the Judicious Reader will be pretty well apprized of the Arguments

Arguments on both sides from what I have already said concerning the Subscription of Candidates, and the Particular last mention'd, the Synod's Printed Declaration. But the Grounds upon which I propose to vindicate the Synod and recommend Peace to the People, are principally these.

First, That the Subscription was wholly Voluntary,

No Rule obliging any to it was ever proposed; nor indeed could be, consistently with the Practice of the Presbyterian Churches, and their known Method of Discipline, only the Synod's Leave was ask'd that such as judg'd it Expedient to Subscribe might take that Opportunity of doing it. And tho' some apprehending the Unhappy Events which have since fallen out, did oppose the Synodical Permission and Protested against it, yet from the Nature of the Thing (abstracting from Circumstances whereof Men had different Views) no such Consequences could arise.

Secondly, Pursuant to this when the Subscription was over, the Synod (or rather the several Parrys in the Synod) made CHARITABLE DECLARATIONS wherein, on the one Hand the Non-Subscribing Members declare, *They Charitably believe that their Brethren, whose Sentiments and Practice are herein (in the matter of Subscription) different from their own, have acted according to the Light of their Consciences, and it was not the Design of the Protest to insinuate any thing to the Contrary, and that it was their (the Non-Subscribers) Resolution to maintain the same Brotherly Correspondence and Communion with their Reverend Brethren as formerly.* On the other Hand the Synod declare's, *That by allowing such Ministers as Judg'd it necessary to Subscribe the Westminster Confession, they did not intend to Intimate the least Reflection on such as had not Freedom to*

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fall into that Method, as if they were unsound in the Faith, and that different Sentiments on that Head do not justify Breach of Communion among us. They earnestly recommend it to their People to entertain no Jealousys, nor ill Opinions of Ministers for not Subscribing, but look upon this as a matter wherein Christians and Ministers are to Exercise mutual Forbearance towards one another.

Since this Difference of opinions happen'd among Ministers, (and tis never to be expected but that such Differences may happen among wise and good Men) what more could be done to prevent the ill effects of it? Or if People will conform themselves to the Example and Advice of the Synod, what ill Consequence can ensue? The Subscription was intirely Voluntary, the Synod gave only an Allowance for it, without so much as recommending it to any one, but barely permitting such as *Themselves* judged it necessary, and so far from countenancing a Breach of Communion, or so much as Jealousy on that account, they earnestly press'd the contrary. The Lairy will act a very different, a directly opposite part, if they insist on Subscription as necessary, or indeed if they be jealous of and disaffected to their Ministers for their opinions on either side of the debate. Let them judge then whether the Conduct of the Ministers (in the Synod) will justify them in making a Breach, in entertaining Suspicions of, in reproaching or deserting Ministers, meerly on the score of Subscribing or Non-Subscribing. If they will proceed so far, the Case must then stand thus; The Ministers differ in their Judgments, the People are divided in their Affections; the Ministers left Subscription free, the People will Impose it; the Ministers practice and recommend mutual Forbearance, the People will make a Schism.

But because this sort of Reasoning from the Judgment and Practice of the Synod may not be thought

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sufficient

sufficient (as I confess it is not enough to determine the People who have a Right to see and judge for themselves, only my Intention was to vindicate the publick Proceedings of the Ministers from the Charge of *Causing Division*.) I shall therefore endeavour to convince the Laity, that the Methods and Resolutions taken by the Synod for preserving Peace are in themselves Christian and Reasonable, and that they ought to acquiesce in them, neither acting in Opposition to them nor urging the Synod to alter them, or to go any farther. And my Method for doing it, shall be this.

First, I will show that Ministers not Subscribing is no Evidence of their Unsoundness.

Secondly, If it be not an Evidence of their Unsoundness, it can be no just Reason for any Ecclesiastical Assembly to Exclude them from Ministerial Communion.

And in the *Third Place* Consequently, the People ought not to separate from their Ministry on that account, nor can they do it consistently with their own Principles.

If these Particulars are fully proved, I hope every one will acknowledge with me, that notwithstanding this Difference, the Union of the Northern Dissenters ought to remain unshaken. For what pretence can there be for separating from Ministers on the account of their not Subscribing, but that either it proves them Heterodox, or that being necessary for Order and Peace, the Church has a Right to require it, and they are disqualify'd for the Ministry by their Disobedience, or else that the People apprehending it more for their Edification, may of their own accord desert them, and

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joyn with others? But the Vanity and Ground-
lessness of all these Pretences will appear when I prove
what I have undertaken.

*First, I will show that Ministers not Subscribing is no
Evidence of their Unsoundness.*

And this I think is very plain, because the Scandal of
Error is a Fact not to be concluded that way accord-
ing to the Rules of Justice and the Gospel. In Ecclesi-
astical as well as all other regular Societys, the only
Evidence of an Offence is the Positive Testimony of
Witnesses, that a Fact is Committed contrary to the
standing Laws of that Society: A Person duly quali-
fy'd and regularly admitted as a Member is to be held
Innocent till he be after this manner convicted of a
Trespas, and to inflict on him the Penalties which
the Legislative Power has appointed for Criminals, is
horrid Usurpation and Iniquity. If in a Common-
wealth or Kingdom, either Subjects who have no
Authority at all, or even Inferior Ministers of Justice
shall invent private Methods of their own for trying
Criminals which the Law has not prescribed; if they
shall contrive Tests different in Words from those
which the publick Authority enjoyns, however agree-
able they may think them in Substance, and treat their
fellow Subjects as Guilty, and punish them for refus-
ing to submit to these Methods of Trial, and to Sub-
scribe these Tests would not such Proceedings be
justly look'd upon as very Irregular? But the Case
seems to me exactly Parallel: The Gospel has pre-
scribed a method for trying Scandals which only are
Facts capable of Proof by Witnesses, and *without
Witnesses an Accusation is not to be received.* Shall Chris-
tians take upon them to find out new Ways of *their*
own for trying their fellow Christians, and for a re-
fusal of Submission hold them Convicted of Scandal,
nay

may and inflict the Penalty of *Non-Communion* which Christ has appointed to be only inflicted on those who according to his Rules are found to *walk disorderly*. We may indeed use private Forms (I call them all such which are Compos'd by Fallible Men) for expressing our own Religious Opinions, without contradicting the Rules of the Gospel, and this is all that I believe the Subscribing Ministers intended to do; but to make these Forms the Instruments of Scrutiny into the Faith of our Brethren, and hold them disqualify'd for Communion upon the score of Error if they will not come into them, can never be vindicated from perverting the Gospel Rules, and intrenching on the Prerogative of Christ and the Rights of his Subjects.

Besides I would have the People consider, that Non-Subscribing cannot prove Ministers Guilty of any Scandal (unless Non-Subscribing it self be a Scandal, and if that be alledged, let the Scripture Rules whereof it is a Transgression be produced) because Scandal is a Fact so far known as to give Offence: In the Case of Error that only which can be called a Scandal is Teaching or otherwise Venting some false Principle. Now if Non-Subscribing proves a Person Guilty of any Error, it is the Secret, otherwise undiscovered Error of his Mind, not that he has declared to others any false Opinion, which alone could be offensive.

But farther, If Non-Subscribing be an Evidence of any Errors contrary to the *Westminster* Confession, which Errors or how many are the Non-Subscribers chargeable with? In that excellent System we all acknowledge the most Essential Truths of Religion are contain'd, as well as some Principles which are Unessential: Now meerly from Non-subscribing we may as well conclude that a Person denies the former as the latter, nay
every

every Proposition in the Confession as well as any. THE BEING OF GOD, for Example, is a Doctrine declared in the Confession, as well as the Power of the Magistrate in Matters of Religion: Dare any of Us say we believe a Non-Subscriber is an Atheist, and accordingly we could justly proceed to punish him; and yet that may be as fairly infer'd merely from Non-Subscribing as that he denies any Proposition in the *twenty third Chapter* of the Confession. All then that this sort of Evidence will amount to is, that we suspect a Non-subscriber is Guilty of some Error, but we can't tell what, nor how dangerous, which if it be a fair way of proving Scandal, let the World Judge. But as we have no Authority from the plain Maxims of Natural Equity or from the Word of God to Conclude that Non-Subscribing is an Evidence of Unsoundness; so we have none from Men. The Ecclesiastical Authority which Presbyterians acknowledge is in their Assemblies (Synods and Presbyterys) but none of them have declared that a Minister shall be held Guilty of Heterodoxy for not Subscribing. The last Synod did it not, but the contrary, and in none of their former Meetings was the Practice of Subscribing so much as permitted, or even propos'd. And *Lastly* the Non-subscribers have Condescended to purge themselves by their own Testimony; they have often declared the Reason of their refusing to Subscribe, is not because they disbelieve the Doctrine of the Confession. If they did Subscribe they would only be Witnesses for themselves, and in effect we have their own Testimony, so far as the present Argument is concern'd, that is to show that Non-Subscribing is no Proof of their Unsoundness.

Secondly, *If not Subscribing be not an Evidence of Ministers Unsoundness, it can be no just Reason for any Ecclesiastical*

ecclesiastical Assembly to exclude them out of Ministerial Communion.

It can't be pretended that refusing to Subscribe shows such Ignorance and Insufficiency as to render Men thereby unfit for the Ministry, nor that it fixes any Scandal on their Lives: It remains then that it must disqualify them as being a Proof of Heterodoxy, which I have shown it is not, or else that the Church agreeing on Subscription as necessary for Peace and Order, they may be justly cast out who are Disobedient, which is the Point I have now under Consideration. 'Tis true this is not the Case in Fact among the *Northern* Presbyterians, nor do I apprehend that ever it will be; for the Synod's CHARITABLE DECLARATION being founded on Reasons of a perpetual Nature (no less than the unchangeable Laws of the Gospel concerning Charity and mutual Forbearance among Christians) I cannot suffer myself to believe that ever they will be induced to depart from it. But some People may entertain other Expectations: At the last Synod some of them insisted, that Subscription should be peremptorily required, tho' Ministers were sensible it could not be done, and I don't know how far they may yet press their Ministers to break Communion with the Non-Subscribers. I will therefore endeavour to Convince them, that they (the Subscribing Ministers) cannot come into such Measures without breaking thro' their own Principles, nay and the standing Rules of Christianity.

In order to this, I desire only it may be granted, (which I think cannot reasonably be deny'd) that no Christian Society has a Right to cast any Man out of the Ministry, or any kind of Church-Communion, unless it be for Reasons for which the Gospel enjoyns
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or allows him to be cast out. If it be not so, the External Privileges of Christianity and Religious Communion are most precarious Things, depending not on the Will of the ONE GREAT LAW-GIVER, but the Arbitrary Will and Pleasure of Men. Now who can possibly believe this that seriously reads the NEW TESTAMENT? Has not our LORD sufficiently declared his Will, that his Servants should associate for outward Religious Acts, and that *for Edifying his Body* there should be Pastors and Teachers in the Church? Has he not declared the necessary Qualifications of the Persons who shall be employ'd in this Sacred Work? They must be *Blameless, Sober, Vigilant, of good Behaviour, Apt to Teach, Faithful Men, Holy, Temperate, Just, Holding fast the Faithful Word.* Whoever is thus qualify'd, having been regularly called to the Ministry, has a Right to continue in it, unless the Laws of Christ may be vacated by the Commands of Men. Let us search the Scriptures as diligently as we can, we shall find nothing requir'd to fit a Man for the Ministry, but what is comprehended in these three, *Aptness to Teach, Soundness in the Faith, and a good Conversation.* And consequently by these Scripture Rules, He who having a competent measure of these Qualifications has been Lawfully Ordain'd, ought not to be rejected but upon an apparent Failure in some of them. Human Laws or Canons enjoyning new Qualifications have no Foundation in the Gospel, and he that is Disqualified by his not complying with them may yet be in all Respects an Approved Minister of CHRIST, and ought to be so regarded by his People. The Rights of Ministers and People must be, I think, allow'd to rest on the same Foundation. As the latter enjoy their Liberties, and claim their Priviledges (the
Tokens

(the Tokens of Christian Communion) by the Gospel, and can't justly be deprived of them but by transgressing the Rules therein prescrib'd; the former are entituled to the Regard due to their peculiar Character by the same great Charter, so long as they fulfil the Conditions which it enjoins. If any Christians shall make exclusive Terms of their own, in so far they depart from the Simplicity of the Gospel, and their Society so far ceases to be the Church of CHRIST, as not being subject to his sole Legislative Authority and entirely govern'd by his Laws. For whenever these Conditions of Membership and Communion are chang'd there is an Essential Change in the Constitution. Again, when new Lawgivers are set up, the Society must be new. And new Lawgivers they are who take upon them to annex Penalties (especially the Penalties which the Ancient and Proper Legislator has fix'd) not to the Original Laws, but to Appointments of their own. In the present Case, that is a Visible Church of CHRIST wherein Communion is maintain'd upon his Terms, and only deny'd for the Transgression of his Laws (such Transgression on the account of which he has appointed it to be deny'd) but it is a Society not of Divine Institution but so far purely Human, as Christians separate from their Brethren, or Excommunicate them for Offences, so called, against Human Decrees.

There is but one way that I know of, for Churches to avoid that Imputation which this Reasoning would fix upon them, (and it is what I contend for, and what the late Synod at *Belfast* practis'd, to their great and just Commendation) namely by leaving Human Prudential Conclusions Free, and without any Penalty. But when *Withdrawing* from our Fellow Christians or Excluding them from Communion is the Sanction of Ecclesiastical Canons, it is, I do not
say

say a Misapplication of the Laws of Christ, but making new Laws for his Subjects. Besides, it is found by Experience, that when these Human Appointments are so vigorously enforc'd they become, in the Esteem of Weaker, or perhaps less serious Christians, Equal, if not Superior to the Original Laws and Doctrines of Christ, and are contended for, as if the ALL of Religion consisted in them; so that it becomes necessary to resist such Encroachments on the *† Liberty which we have in Christ Jesus* and not give Place by Subjection, that the Truth of the Gospel (the Uncorrupted, Original, Divine Scheme for our Acceptance with God, and our Religious Fellowship one with another) may continue in the Church. And therefore however tolerable some Usages of Human Invention may be in the Church (as it is scarce to be expected any Society of Christians will be altogether free of them) Imposition makes them *heavy Burdens, and grievous to be born.*

If it be Objected, that some things which are not expressly enjoyn'd in Scripture yet seem to be highly expedient, yea necessary in some Circumstances at least, for preserving Purity and Order in the Church; for Example, when there is great, and immediate Danger of Error, then to Subscribe or otherwise declare an assent to a Form of Sound Words, seems to be the best and most effectual way for securing Truth: I answer, The greatest Expediency or even seeming Necessity will not warrant Christians in departing from the Scripture Rules, or prescribing to one another what Christ has not prescrib'd. The Security of Truth, the Decency of Worship, and the

Order of the Church do not *Stand in the Wisdom of Man, but in the Will and Power of God*. Has our Blessed Saviour left his precious Interests without any necessary Security, or impowered any of his Followers to supply the Defects of his Care and Wisdom? Did not he or his Spirit inspiring the Apostles foresee what his Church should need in every Age?

This Objection, tho' the most plausible that I know of and the most insisted on, seems to me, I confess, a very unhappy one, and most effectually to destroy the Cause it is brought to support, because the more Necessary and Important any Human Expedients are suppos'd to be for answering the proper Ends of the Gospel, the greater is the Reflection on the Wisdom of Christ and the Perfection of his Laws. Let Christians seriously consider with themselves which sort of Reasoning is safest and best (and a deliberate Resolution of this one Point ought to determine the whole Controversy). Either, "Such particular Methods and Forms (whether of Confessing our Faith, or any other Religious Acts) seem to us or other uninspired Men highly Usefull, very Conducive, nay in some Circumstances Necessary for preserving sound Doctrine, pure Worship, and the Peace and Beautiful Order of the Church, at least of our Church in particular, and therefore we may conclude our selves warranted to enjoin them strictly under the Penalty of Non-Communion, altho' they are not requir'd in Scripture:" Or thus, "We do not find such things enjoin'd in Scripture, and therefore whatever plausible Reason may be pleaded for them, whatever Appearance of Zeal the Rigid Imposition of them may have (and this Charity is certainly due to some who incline to enjoin them, that they act with an upright Intention) however useful they may seem to us, yet submitting our own to the

“ the infinitely superior Wisdom and faithful Care of
“ Christ in which we are indispensibly bound to
“ Acquiesce, we cannot conclude them Necessary,
“ especially to so great Purposes as preserving Sound-
“ ness in the Faith, pure Worship and Christian
“ Communion, which being the proper Ends of the
“ Gospel, if it has not sufficiently provided for them
“ it must be look’d upon as Defective.

The Truth is, all the Warmth which the several
Sects of Christians discover in contending for their
particular Unscriptural Usages and Forms arises from
their not considering the Difference between Expedi-
ency and Necessity. Those things which appear to
them Convenient or which they have been accusom’d
to they Conclude must be, and such as Refuse them
are disorderly Persons and unfit for their Communion.
But if we would carefully look into the Gospel and
from thence take our Notions of Fitness, Necessity,
and the Terms of External Religious Communion, we
should judge quite otherwise. There indeed a Di-
stinction is made between things *Expedient*, and posi-
tively enjoin’d. In the former which depend on vari-
able Circumstances, Christians are left to conduct
themselves as well as they can, according to Prudence
and Charity, but never any such stress is laid upon
them, as that Christians for different Sentiments or
Practices, may be held by one another unworthy of
their Communion. St. Paul, than whom no Man was
ever more Condescending to his weak Brethren, be-
came as weak to them, He became all things to all Men,
He declar’d he would not eat Flesh while the World stand-
eth rather than make his Brother Offend, yet no one ever
more strenuously asserted Christian Liberty. Did he
ever place Christian Communion or the Exercise of the
Ministry on so narrow a Foot as an Agreement in Ex-
pediencys? Did he ever require Christians to Excom-
municate

municate one another for abstaining or refusing to abstain from Meats? On the Contrary, he earnestly presses them to Receive one another, *not to doubtful Disputations.** In matters of Expediency or Inexpediency (which taken with all their Circumstances are either Sin or Duty) every Christian must judge for himself and govern himself according to his best Light, unless he will implicitly resign his Conscience to Men. But if in Expediencies which were even declared to be such by the Inspired Apostles, nay in things of a higher Nature but Unessential, Difference of Judgment and Practice ought not to break Communion, (as 'tis plain from Scripture it ought not) how dare Weak Un-inspired Men take upon them to exclude their Brethren for differing from them only in things which to their Fallible Judgment seem Expedient?

But of all People in the Christian World, it is most surprising, that the Protestant Dissenters should carry their Notions of Church Authority so high as some of them seem to do in Uninstituted Things and Matters of meer apprehended Expediency. The main Principle, if I mistake not, of Non-Conformity is this, *That no Humane Power ought to make any thing necessary to Christians, as a Term of Communion which Christ has not made Necessary.* Take away this, and the Dissenters are Divided, at least I don't know one Principle wherein they will agree, I mean as Non-Conformists. The Points in Difference between the Establish'd Church and them, are many of them agreed by the Wiser on the one Side, to be not Commanded, and on the other to be not Forbidden in Scripture. Whence then comes the Division? The Dissenters think themselves just-

* Rom, 14. 1.

fied in their Separation by the Principle I have mentioned, and will they then act inconsistently with it, nay in direct Contradiction to it? They are not Principles at all, not fit to be espous'd by any Wise Man which cannot be uniformly maintain'd. Will they say, our Injunctions are really Expedient, those of the Church of *England* are not so; their's are many, ours are few; We Dissent from the Establish'd Church. Conscientiously, Others differ from us merely from Humour? Besides the Uncharitableness of such Suggestions, the Reasoning is poor and mean, and the Reply is Obvious to be insisted on; and it has this Advantage against the Dissenters, that the Wisdom of the Civil as well as Ecclesiastical Superiors is on the side of the Establish'd Impositions.

I'm sensible it was not necessary to pursue this Argument at so great a Length in order to convince the Presbyterian Ministers in the *North*. They understand their Principles, and will not give them up: They have acted agreeably to them in their late Excellent *Charitable Declaration*. But I thought it might be useful to descend, as I have done, to the meanest Capacities of their People, that at least they (the Ministers) may be delivered from their Importunity, and especially, that the Laity may not continue to show such Ignorance as many do of the very Grounds of their Non-Conformity. How shameful is it for Men, Good Men, and otherwise Judicious (as some of those are whom in this case I oppose) by a most absurd Contradiction to Destroy the Cause which they profess to Maintain? Will not the world believe, that they are not, as they pretend, making a stand against the Encroachments of Human Power on the Rights of Conscience, but contending that Power may change Hands and be lodg'd in themselves, or some of their own Perswasion.

In the Third Place, I will show that the People ought not to separate from their Ministers on the account of Non-Subscribing and that they cannot do it consistently with their Principles.

If the other particulars are fully prov'd, as I hope it will appear to the Reader they are, there can remain no great doubt concerning this which is a Plain and Natural Consequence from them: For what pretence can there be for People deserting their Minister while there is no reason that will Justify a Church in excluding him out of her Communion. The Relation is mutual, and while the Pastor faithfully performs his Duty, and has the Qualifications of a Gospel Minister, the People can never be excus'd in neglecting their Dutys to him and particularly attending his Ministry. I wish they would seriously consider what is the just construction of such Treatment, in effect this, they pronounce their Minister Unworthy of his Station, when yet, as I have shown, they have no sufficient Objection against him. Whatever will justify them in their Separation from him, will much more justify other Christians in using him the same way; Nay they invite other Congregations to do so by giving the Example of such a publick groundless Indignity to his Character. Thus a Laborious, Faithful, and for ought that appears to the contrary, Orthodox Minister is turn'd out of his Office very effectually indeed, but in a confused irregular manner.

If any pretend that their Edification is marred by Scruples which have arisen in their minds on this occasion of their Ministers not Subscribing, I would have them carefully to examine the Grounds of these Scruples. In order to so valuable an end as Edification it greatly imports Christians to enquire into the Temper of their own Spirits and divest themselves of prejudices; Suitable Dispositions are requir'd on the part of the Hearers, as well as it is requisite that Ministers should

their best endeavours to prepare *Instructive Sermons*. When the Word Preach'd do's not profit, the Hearers ought not rashly to lay the blame on the Preacher; they may rather reasonably suspect that themselves are in the fault, when Sound Doctrine is taught them, and *Wholesom Words*, even the Words of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. Let every Man then that he may do Justice to himself in an Affair of so great Moment, impartially Search out the Causes whereby his Edification is hindred, and not Charge upon Another what is only the Effect of a groundless Perturbation in his own Mind. In short, if People will condemn and reject their Ministers, it must either be upon just Reasons, or unjust Prejudices: In the present Case I have shewn they have no just Reasons, and I hope Conscientious Persons will not allow themselves to deal by their Ministers as they must be sensible they ought not to deal by any of Mankind in any Relation, that is, censure and cast them off meerly upon unjust Prejudices,

I know some People who are Zealous enough for Church Power and Order (or what they imagine to be Order) nay, it may be, too much inclin'd to encroach on the Priviledges of their Neighbours, are apt when they find it for their Purpose to plead very strongly for the Rights of Private Judgment, and particularly for Liberty in choosing their Pastors: But I hope they will not look upon it as an Invasion of their Rights to offer them Arguments, and that they do not claim such a Freedom as to exclude Impartial Consideration. Let them in GOD'S Name, after they have with Unprejudic'd Minds maturely weigh'd the Reasons on both Sides, act according to the Light of their own Consciences. Only I beg leave, besides all the other Considerations I have offer'd, briefly to put them in mind of their own Principles.

If

If I do not mistake the Presbyterian Scheme which the Northern Dissenters generally hold to be of Divine Institution, it necessarily requires, that the Pastoral Relation be enter'd into, or dissolved with the Consent and by the Interposition of an Ecclesiastical Assembly, Presbytery or Synod. If any Minister shall take the oversight of a Flock, and they subject themselves to his Ministry, or if a Minister Quit his Charge or the People Reject him without such Consent and Interposition, in any of these cases the Proceeding is upon a Bottom directly contrary to the Presbyterian Model. It is evident therefore that if the Presbyterian Laity shall in the present Circumstances desert or reject their Ministers for not Subscribing, they fly in the Face of their own Church Constitution in the most Essential Parts of it: For not only they neglect their Ecclesiastical Assemblys, but act in direct Opposition to the highest of them, the GENERAL SYNOD. And it is the more unreasonable for them to do so, because their pretended Motive is Zeal for *Presbytery*, and one of the Principal Objections (or Suspicions rather) against the Non-Subscribing Ministers is, That they are not sufficiently attached to that Form of Church Government. Cannot *Presbyterianism* stand on it's own Foundation, must it be supported by *Independency*, and is there no other way of shewing our Zeal for it but what does effectually destroy it? I hope the *Independents* will not think I intend to throw any Invidious reflection on their Way: I assure them I do not, and I am satisfied the Wise Men of that Denomination would be far from countenancing such Disorders and Confusion as I am Arguing against; it being their known Principle and Practice, in all Affairs of this Nature, to take the Advice of Neighbouring Ministers where it can be had, and to act in Concert with them as

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Consultative Bodies. And I must do such of them as I am acquainted with the Justice to own, that in those Associations whereof they are Members, none can pay a greater deference to the Judgment of their Brethren, nor show a greater regard to Peace and Order than they do on all occasions. The only view I have in mentioning the Independent Scheme in the manner I do is to show the Presbyterians, that if their conduct in the case I now suppose can possibly be reconciled to any Regular Form of Church Government (a Supposition which may very well be contested) it is not that which they profess to adhere to and maintain.

But if Differences in the *North* should not come to any farther height, and no such Consequence happen as the Ejecting or Separating from Ministers merely for not subscribing, I wish the People would seriously consider the ill Tendency of the Part they have already taken in the affairs of their Church Assemblies. There is, I hope, no occasion to apprehend that ever Important Points of Christianity will be opposed in Presbyteries and Synods; if they be, then let the People take the Alarm: But while Ministers do in their meetings only debate about matters of Expediency, why should the Laity be so extremely concern'd? The Effect must be to intimidate their Teachers and restrain their Freedom: Ministers will not dare (at least they are laid under a strong Temptation not) to act according to their own Judgments, without knowing first the Mind of their Congregations, and what will become of *Presbytery* in the end of such Methods? In the meantime the Zealots have run themselves into inextricable Difficulties, and are engaged in Measures which they cannot consistently pursue (but I hope they will be persuaded to depart from them) they raise a vehement Cry for Presby-

terian Principles and Constitution which yet they must desert before they can obtain their End. Their Ecclesiastical Assemblies have no way of casting Non-Subscribers out of their Communion but by deposing them, which no Man of Sense dare avow a Resolution to do; and the People cannot forsake them, without first forsaking the regular Methods of Discipline, and a *Jure Divino* Form of Church Government.

I have now finish'd what I intended on this Subject; and as a Conclusion I will reduce the Substance of what I have said to a few plain Propositions; against them I will set down the directly contrary, which must be true if mine are false. The Reader may then Judge for himself, and if any one is disposed to undertake the Refutation of this Paper, he will see what he has to prove and what to disprove. If any are inclin'd to make a Breach among the Northern Dissenters, I cannot but think they ought to shew the World upon what Foundations they build their Schemes; and what Principles they proceed upon; and in particular let them remember they are now publicly call'd upon to discover how they will make their way through the Argument which this short Essay lays before them. If they shall give no answer and yet meditate and endeavour to effect a Rupture between the Subscribing and Non-subscribing Ministers, I must Conclude, and so I believe will others, they act but a mean unworthy Part, and the Grounds of their Conduct are such as cannot bear the Light. Personal Reflections I will have nothing to do with, or little Flings at unguarded Expressions, (unguarded Expressions I doubt not there are in this, as I am sure there are in much better Performances) these are often found to be the Refuges of a bad Cause, which Men having private interested Views or of weak Understandings are obstinately resolv'd to maintain.

A Reply to such Things I must regard as too low an Employment; but if any one thinks fit to enter fairly into the Debate with me, he must either show that I have not truly represented the Case and laid down those Principles by which the main Question is to be decided (not the Question between the Subscribers and Non-subscribers, but this whether notwithstanding that Difference a perfect Union ought to remain among the Presbyterians in the North) or else he must detect show the Falshood of The Principles I have laid down: I shall willingly attend a farther Impartial Enquiry into these Points and rejoice in the Discovery of Truth. The Propositions and their contraries upon which I think the whole Controversy turns are these following.

First, Christians ought not to Slander one another, they ought not to report things to the Prejudice of their Fellow Christians Characters (particularly Ministers) nor entertain Jealousies without Evidence.

to Christians may slander one another, they may report things to the Prejudice of their Fellow Christians Characters (particularly the Characters of Ministers) and entertain Jealousies without any Evidence.

Secondly, The different ways used by Ministers in mentioning the Confession of Faith at Baptism are no sufficient Reason for Separate Communion; that Form used by some viz. recommending it as a good Abridgment of Christian Doctrine and advising Parents and others to Compare it with and examine

The difference among Ministers in their way of mentioning the Confession of Faith at Baptism is a sufficient reason for separate Communion; that Form used by some viz. recommending it as a good Abridgment of Christian Doctrine and advising Parents and others to compare it with and examine it

amine it by the Scriptures, is perfectly agreeable to Protestant Principles; and being so (and no other Form prescrib'd by any Rules among the Presbyterians) it is no just Cause of reflecting on or separating from any Ministers.

Thirdly, The Difference of Opinions among Ministers about Intrants into the Ministry their Subscribing the Westminster Confession as the sole Test of Orthodoxy (with an allowance to alter some scrupled Phrases) or leaving the Intrant to his Liberty to make that or any other satisfying Profession of his Orthodoxy; this Difference ought not on either side to cause a Breach of Communion.

Fourthly, Some Ministers declining to Vote with the late Synod in their Declaration concerning the Divinity of Christ is no Evidence of their Unsoundness in that Article; since the Synod Themselves declare they know none of their Communion unsound in that Point; and farther

it by the Scriptures, is not agreeable to Protestant Principles, and not being so, or whether it be so or not (and altho' no particular Form is prescrib'd by any Rules among the Presbyterians yet) it is a just Cause of reflecting on, or separating from Ministers.

The Difference of Opinions among Ministers about Intrants into the Ministry their being oblig'd to subscribe the Westminster Confession as the sole Test of Orthodoxy (with an allowance to alter some scrupled Phrases) or leaving the Intrant at Liberty to make that or any other Profession which shall be satisfying to those who admit him; this difference will justify one side or the other in breaking Communion.

Some Ministers declining to Vote with the late Synod in their Declaration concerning the Divinity of Christ is an Evidence of their Unsoundness in that Article, tho' the Synod Themselves declare they know none of their Communion unsound in that point; and farther assert in

farther assert in their Minutes that those Ministers who did not Vote yet profess'd the Doctrine in the strongest Terms, and that the reason of their not Voting was that they could not approve of Human Authoritative Decisions as Tests of Orthodoxy, and in their Opinion such a Declaration was unseasonable at that Time.

Fifthly, Some Ministers not Subscribing the Westminster Confession at the last Synod is no sufficient Proof of their Unsoundness in the Faith.

Sixthly, Since not subscribing the Westminster Confession at the last Synod is no sufficient Evidence of Unsoundness (there being no other pretence whereby it can be said otherwise to disqualify them according to the Gospel Rules) No Synod or other Ecclesiastical Assembly has Right or Authority from CHRIST THE SOLE HEAD AND KING OF HIS CHURCH to exclude them on that account from Christian and Ministerial Communion.

Seventh-

in their Minutes that those Ministers who did not Vote yet profess'd the Doctrine in the strongest Terms, and that the avowed Reason of their not Voting was that they could not approve of Human Authoritative Decisions as Tests of Orthodoxy, and in their Opinion such a Declaration was unseasonable at that Time.

The Ministers who did not come into the Voluntary Subscription of the Westminster Confession at the last Synod gave thereby sufficient Proof of their Unsoundness in the Faith.

Altho' not Subscribing the Westminster Confession at the last Synod is no sufficient Evidence of Unsoundness, and altho' there is no other pretence whereby it can be said otherwise to disqualify them according to express Scripture Rules, yet Synods or other Ecclesiastical Assemblies may by their own Authority on that account exclude them from Christian or Ministerial Communion.

Altho'

Seventhly, Since not Sub-
scribing is no Evidence of
Unsoundness and Ecclesiasti-
cal Assemblies cannot justly
on that account exclude Mi-
nisters from Ministerial
Communion, the People ought
not therefore to condemn
them or desert their Mini-
stry, and they cannot do it
consistently with their Prin-
ciples as Presbyterians.

Altho' not Subscribing is
no Evidence of Unsoundness
and Ecclesiastical Assemblies
cannot exclude Ministers
from Ministerial Communi-
on on that account, yet Peo-
ple may for not Subscribing
condemn their Ministers
and desert their Ministry
and they may do this consis-
tently with Presbyterian Prin-
ciples or they may in this,
act inconsistently with Pres-
byterian Principles, yet con-
tinuing Presbyterians; or
finally they may forsake Pres-
byterian Principles, that they
may desert their Ministers.

I will now take my leave of the Parties with this
earnest request, that whereunto they have attain'd, they
will walk by the same Rule and mind the same things;
and wherein they differ that they will exercise Chris-
tian Charity and Mutual Forbearance. Let them not
(especially the Ministers) charge the Consequences
which they apprehend to follow from the Opinions
they oppose on the intentions of each other; for that
is unworthy of Scholars, of Christians and Divines
and very disagreeable to their own Charitable Decla-
tions. Let not Subscribers say that their Brethren
if they are not Erroneous themselves yet Intend
to screen Hereticks from Censure and to intro-
duce Heresy and Scepticism into the Church; nor
Non-Subscribers insinuate that those who differ from
them in this Point designedly favour Popery, that
they claim Infallibility, or deny the Perfection of the
Scriptures

Scriptures; such insinuations on both sides are really Unjust as well as Uncharitable. Let them *Follow after those things which make for Peace*, and I hope by the Blessing of GOD on their Pious and Peaceful Endeavours the Differences among them and their People will yet be happily healed.

If this attempt shall prove useful to the restoring of Concord among the *Northern Dissenters* (for whom I have a great and just Esteem) I shall greatly rejoice in it; however I enjoy the inward Comfort of having sincerely contributed my best Endeavours to so good an End, and they themselves can't but be sensible I have handled their Debates with the Coolness of a *By Stander* and the Tenderness of a Friend.

John Abernethy.

Antrim, 1722.

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